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ABSTRACT

Advice is given for institutions applying for Group Projects Abroad (GPA) grants. Information is based on the successfuil planning and implementation of projects for preservice teachers in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. An outline and discussion is offered of factors that must be carefully examined to assure success of a GPA proposal: (1) quality of the support program of the institution submitting the proposal; (2) clarity and concurrence in program design if a consortium is involved; (3) clarity and concurrence in the program expectations and parameters by participants and supervisors in the local institution; (4) access to and development of firm support in the host country; (5) quality of pre-departure orientation; and (6) the viability and feasibility of logistics for the seminar. It is emphasized that the submitting institution must have adequate resources to prepare the participants, to plan a significant educational overseas program, and to guarantee perseverance in group followup activities upon their return. Goals of the program must be realistic and relevant to the objectives of the submitting institution's educational program development. Planning with the host country must be thorough and initiated far in advance of the time of the project. Participants must understand fully the expectations held by the project director regarding their responsibilities before, during, and after the seminar. (JD)

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Group Projects Abroad Planning, Orientation, Working with the Host Government

A paper presented at the African Studies Association, Washington, D.C., November 6, 1982, by Marylee Wiley, Outreach Coordinator, African Studies Center, Michigan State University.

Introduction

This paper considers the importance for successful applicants for Group Projects Abroad (GPA) grants to plan early, to set clear goals, to negotiate with all parties concerned, to design a careful orientation and to have a clear understanding of responsibilities with the host government. These lessons have been learned through the planning and carrying out of two very successful Group Projects Abroad to Africa, one to Tanzania in 1979, and one to Zimbabwe in 1982. Both were designed for teachers at the pre-collegiate level and both were planned by the African Studies Center at Michigan State University. Some of the lessons learned from these projects can be beneficial to people preparing similar projects. Several measures of "success" are used in declaring these projects successful. Neither project lost participants due to culture shock or failure to cope with the exigencies of the six week seminar. Both groups were invited to return by the host governments, and both have resulted in continued professional relationships between U.S. educators and their counterparts in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Both projects were very carefully planned through personal visits and through voluminous correspondence well before the seminars took place, and both projects encompassed diverse programming in the host country, including a study program, visitation to schools and other educational institutions, and travel throughout the country. Each seminar was limited to one country for the entire six week period, although participants traveled on their own elsewhere in Africa, before and after the project. Charter flights were not used, nor did the participants travel together as a group. Neither project exceeded its budget. Participants in both projects have developed teaching materials based on their study and have given inservice workshops based on their experiences.

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(Two other papers in this series discuss the importance of careful selection of participants and the necessity for well-planned follow-up to make maximum use of the experiences of the educators on the seminar. This paper, therefore, will not discuss these two critical considerations.)

There are five general categories (excluding the participant selection process) which encompass the period from the inception of the idea to the follow-up period upon return. These are: the quality of the support program of the institution submitting the proposal; the clarity and concurrence in program design if a consortium is involved; the clarity and concurrence in the expectations and parameters of the program, by participants and by supervisors in their local school or other local institutional base; the access to and development of firm support in the host country; the quality of pre-departure orientation; and the viability and feasibility of the structure of the seminar itself.

A. Strength and Quality of the Support Program of the Institution Submitting the Proposal

1. Setting Priorities. A Group Projects Abroad proposal should not be submitted in a vacuum, with no relationship to the goals, objectives and strategies of the submitting institution. If the strength of the agency submitting the proposal is in work with pre-collegiate teachers, they should be the target audience and the proposal should reflect their interests. If the agency is strong in work with museum personnel, artists, linguists, or the press, these audiences should be sought and programs planned accordingly. The goals of the project should be consonant with the capabilities of the submitting agency to deliver the needed intellectual guidance, resources, services and contacts abroad to develop a comprehensive and high quality program. The corollary to this is that participants should be sought who meet the program goals of the submitting agency. This may cause

problems because finding the best participants is not always easy, especially given time constraints (sometimes summer programs are not given final approval until late spring, after some potential participants may have been forced to make other plans) and because people who have access to subsidized travel abroad may suddenly find that they have many friends reminding them of their friendships, or promising access to well-known people through the friend. These are realities which intrude upon the program goals and objectives and must be carefully avoided.

2. Concurrence of Submitting Institution. The administration of the submitting institution, especially the grants and contracts office, must know of the plans for the project and concur in them early. This is especially important in a GPA because there are no indirect costs allowed on the grant; therefore, the expenses of administering it are placed entirely on the submitting institution. Without the early approval of the administration, the project could fail at the last moment to be accepted for submission, or, feeling that it was not a part of the process, the grants office could be uncooperative in administering the grant once it is received.

In addition, the administration must see the value of the program and the ways in which it will enhance the goals of international education in the institution generally.

3. Access to Recruitment of Participants Where Impact Potential is High. The submitting agency must know how it will proceed to recruit participants. If no channels have been developed in the past to those educators, reporters, museum staff, etc., it will be difficult to reach the best placed audience who qualify for the project. The GPA must be part of an on-going program which already has a clear idea of how to identify the best potential participants. This may be through a single school district, through a previous

summer course of self-selected teachers, through other professional organizations, or through use of the active mailing list of the submitting agency.

The selection process must take into account the potential impact that each participant has on other people, institutions and programs. For example, the specialist in fine arts for a large school district is probably more strategically placed to influence art education in the district than is a classroom teacher. This is not to say that classroom teachers should be excluded from a general educational GPA program. On the contrary, they bring important experience and expert advice to such a group. Participants should include classroom teachers, administrators and special consultants. If the object of the GPA is to work specifically with finely defined categories of persons, such as media educators or the press, then the same careful selection must take place within those constituencies. Persons at all levels of influence within the targeted audience must be sought.

4. Availability of Staff. Good GPA programs require inordinate amounts of staff time, which is not covered by grant funds, but which is cost-shared by the submitting institution. Staff are needed for many categories of support to the project, such as:

a) Publicity for recruiting of applicants must be prepared, disseminated and responded to

b) Reading materials must be selected, duplicated and distributed

c) A Selection panel must be established of competent persons who can take the time to evaluate the applications and reach decisions about finalists and alternates. It must be chosen carefully with regard to the politics of the other particpating institutions. For example, a selection panel for a general educational program in Zimbabwe

through a specific school district must acknowledge the political importance of participation in the selection process by the teachers' union, the administration, the submitting university and possibly the board of education or state department of education.

d) The orientation period must be carefully planned and staffed. It is best if several all-day Saturday sessions are scheduled throughout the preceding academic year, followed by an intensive five or six day orientation during which the group is accommodated in one place. Staff are needed to plan this accommodation, food service, transportation, parking, meeting rooms, film rentals and showing. Staff must correspond with lecturers and arrange for their honoraria to be paid. Clerical as well as administrative assistance is very important in these plans.

5. Relationship with Other Institutions if a Consortium is Submitting the Grant. Nothing can be more devastating to a consortial arrangement than to have one party present a "fait accompli" for a GPA proposal. It must be a mutual effort from the start, and thorough planning must be done by all parties concerned. One interested party cannot know the expectations and limitations of the others, but these can be learned and agreement can be reached through early meetings and through clear delegation of tasks for preparing various parts of the proposal.

There must be concurrence on the following:

a) Objectives and goals of the project

b) Responsibility of each party in the consortium for the grant writing process, editing, collection of support letters, etc.

c) Length and content of the application form to be sent to interested persons (see attached)

d) Screening process and final authority for selection of participants

e) Distribution of types of participants if the GPA is for general audience of educators, eg:

- level (K-12? secondary? elementary?)
- teachers/ administrators/specialists
- men/women
- racial distribution
- discipline distribution (are there priority disciplines?)

f) Number of orientation days throughout the year; length, place and time of pre-departure orientation period

g) Division of program responsibility for orientation sessions, for the overseas segment, for follow-up, and for contacts with the press, community institutions where the project can have impact, and with the administration, school board, or trustees of an institution

h) Fiscal responsibility. Which institution agrees to submit the grant and to account to the U.S. Department of Education? What financial forms and accounting procedures are required which the group leader should know about in advance?

The strength and quality of the submitting institution must be adequate to meet these needs.

B. Program Expectations and Parameters

Individual participants and their institutions (schools, museums, boards of education, departments) must know and accept their responsibilities as beneficiaries of the GPA program. It has been helpful to explain in detail these expectations in the application form so that the persons and the institutions in which they work understand and accept their responsibilities before selections are made.

1. Individual Responsibility. Individuals must commit themselves to the full program, including:

a) Attendance at the full orientation program, however it may be designed (single days, week long)

b) Academic commitment to read and study the materials disseminated about the country and project

c) Acceptance and pre-payment of cost-sharing (It has been effective to require 25% of the total seminar costs to be paid by the participants.)

d) Participation in the full six weeks of the overseas seminar with no exceptions made for personal events such as attending weddings, meeting friends for a tour, etc.

e) Acceptance of the overseas program and full participation in all aspects of it, including bus trips, lectures, inservice work on the part of the teacher (if appropriate)

f) Acknowledgement that the program is designed for the group and that friends met locally overseas are not welcome to join the seminar unless the directors agree that their presence will not be deleterious to the group

g) Acceptance of personal responsibility to take maximum advantage of the seminar to meet new colleagues, establish new relationships with schools or other institutions, to seek new cultural experiences not in the planned program

h) Willingness to share with the group knowledge of events, of places of interest, and of opportunities for further cultural exchange rather than to keep these opportunities selfishly to oneself (This was beautifully illustrated in the Tanzania group when three teachers were invited by President Nyerere's son to come to meet his father.

The three immediately asked if the whole group could come, thereby sharing a very special occasion which they could have kept to themselves).

2. Institutional Responsibility. The institution in which the GPA participant works must be aware of the opportunity afforded one of its staff and must offer support. For GPA programs involving school teachers, this has meant many or all of the following:

a) Publicity in the local press to call public attention to the opportunity

b) Release time for the teacher or administrator to attend orientation programs, give inservice workshops as follow-up, develop curricular materials

c) Financial support, with direct funds or indirectly through provision of supplies (film, posterboard, travel support, etc.)

It has been useful to prepare a contract to be signed by the participant, by his or her supervisor (and superintendent if appropriate) and by the project leader to state clearly these responsibilities. These contracts have been helpful for teachers returning from the seminar who need to remind their supervisors of their promise of release time to fulfill obligations for follow-up work.

C. Support in the Host Country

Access to and development of support in the host country is the third critical component of planning a GPA. Early contact, a year or more in advance, should be made to the appropriate ministry, university or other government agency through which the project will be planned. Personal contacts in these institutions can accelerate the process of gaining acceptance of the idea. It is advantageous for the proposal submitted to U.S.D.E. to state the acceptance of the plan by the appropriate institution in the host country.

An early, personal planning visit to the host country should be part of the budget submitted with the grant. If someone from the submitting institution is going to the host country for other reasons, that person should plan to take a half day or more to meet with the persons who have responded to the early correspondence. If need be, a special trip by the group leader should be made four or five months in advance of the program to meet with the host country personnel designated to work on the project. Meetings between the project director and the host country designee should include:

1. A clear understanding of the purpose of the project, of its funding source, and of the kinds of materials the participants are expected to develop and to disseminate as results of their learning experience.
2. Discussion of the plans as designed by the submitting institution, with options to alter and amend these in ways which both persons agree would benefit the participants and the host country.
3. A clear understanding of the division of responsibility for
   a) housing and board
   b) reliable transportation for trips
   c) time table for the six week program
   d) scope and content of the lecture program
   e) selection and inviting of lecturers
   f) number and choice of field trips
   g) long and/or short term visits to schools, museums, government agencies, ministries, including permission to enter restricted areas
   h) lectures, inservice workshops or other programs requiring substantial advance planning to utilize participants as contributors to the local educational system
   i) press relations
   j) official social events

4. A clear understanding of the program (local transport, honoraria, rental of facilities, etc.) and that all local costs are the responsibility of the U.S. institution, not of the host country.

D. Pre-Departure Orientation

The single most important part of a GPA seminar is the preparation and orientation of the participants before they leave the U.S. This is true regardless of whether or not they have been out of the country before.

1. Knowledge of the Country. Knowledge of the country, of its history, culture, economy, political system, educational system, languages, relations with the U.S. and with regional or neighboring countries - is basic to the success of a GPA seminar. A vigorous reading program should begin the moment participants are selected. For the two projects used as examples in this paper, over 120 articles and a dozen books were selected and disseminated to the participants before their departure. These were reported on and discussed during the several days of orientation. The cost-sharing contributed by each participant ($995) was used to pay for reproducing these articles and for purchasing the books. During the final orientation before departure and upon immediate return from the seminar, participants were given pre and post tests. Each was required to identify correctly on a map all of the nations of Africa, to spell the country names correctly and to achieve 100% on the cognitive test. (see attached)

African consultants took part in the early one-day sessions and gave lectures on southern Africa, generally a region unknown to the teachers. If the given GPA participants are better informed about the area to which they are traveling, these initial lectures can be at a more advanced level.

2. Development of Ideas for Teaching Materials. The early orientation days included time to identify possible topics to be developed for post-project inservice workshops. Teachers met according to disciplines, in these

groups: fine arts, social studies and language arts. These are the categories for which teaching materials are being developed. Participants met under the leadership of the director of the federal teacher center in Detroit to plan their follow-up projects, and she assumed responsibility for the follow-up work of the participants.

3. Language. The five day orientation period, in this case on the MSU campus, included three hours per day of language study. This brief introduction to the greeting system and to elementary statements of personal identity aided the participants to greet their Zimbabwean colleagues and others with whom they interacted in their daily rounds. Language training was not necessary, but the small amount learned by each participant proved to be beneficial in establishing good relations with local people.

4. Study Program. (See attached orientation program.) The longer orientation program included lectures by MSU faculty with expertise on Zimbabwe, by Zimbabweans on campus and by a Zimbabwean Foreign Curriculum Consultant from another university who assumed responsibility for the language teaching and for coordinating the discussions following the lectures. (She also joined the group in Zimbabwe.)

5. Films. Evenings were reserved for showing films about Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia. These were new to the participants, and were very educational in giving them a political, economic and sociological overview of the region.

6. Cultural Shock. One of the most important lectures was about culture shock. This was especially true for the group going to Tanzania in 1979. None of the participants had ever been to Africa, and all said that they were well-prepared for culture shock by the candid comments made during orientation. One coordinator of multi-ethnic education in Detroit confided that she had every expectation of "going home to Africa," but that she had

suffered deep culture shock and could cope with it only because it had been so carefully described during the orientation.

7. Health Matters. A special lecture on health problems in the tropics was given by a faculty expert in disease research in Africa. He was practical and reassuring in giving advice on what symptoms are important to watch for and which ones are inconsequential. His advice on preventive measures was well-used by the groups and no one became seriously ill. Many participants enjoyed the local food and drink, others did not, but no one avoided it from fear of becoming ill.

8. Cross-Cultural Simulation. Participants played a half-day simulation game in cross-cultural communication and gave the experience high marks in the written evaluation of the orientation (see attached). A former Peace Corps volunteer in Africa, specializing in cross-cultural communication, conducted the session.

9. Photography. A brief amount of time was devoted to hints on taking good pictures in Africa, including technical advice and respect for persons who may not wish to be photographed.

The orientation period was very strenuous and some complained of the intensity of the five days. All agreed, however, that everything in the program was important. Bringing the entire group together for this prolonged interaction helped them to know one another better which, in turn, added to the adjustments needed for group life in Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

E. Logistics of the Overseas Seminar

Regardless of the amount of time taken prior to departure to explain the logistics and living situation in the host country, there are inevitable misunderstandings. Group leaders are urged to give as much detail as possible about:

1. Accommodation (Where? Doubles or singles? How many baths available? hot water? screens? heaters? fans?)

2. Food (Cafeteria? dormitory "student" food? big meals? "African" food? cost?)

3. Transportation (Busses? taxis? trains? comfortable or "indigenous" transport?)

4. Finances How is the maintenance stipend distributed? Does each participant pay individual costs or is the group leader expected to pay for accommodation and transport out of the maintenance stipends?

5. Local Leader What is the responsibility of the local leader or program planner? Can participants expect him or her to change plans to suit their needs or wishes? How does the local leader relate to the project director?

6. Special Committees These are important to facilitate the program. Persons are needed to

a) write thank you letters to speakers

b) buy teaching materials for group use

c) plan group social occasions

d) help make decisions in program changes

e) serve as spokespersons to the press

Such committees relieve the local leader and project director of many tedious tasks and involve participants in the daily affairs of the project.

Summary

Successful programs funded under Group Projects Abroad require very careful planning. The submitting institution must have adequate resources to prepare the participants, to plan a significant educational overseas program, and to guarantee perseverance in follow-up with the group members upon their return. Goals of the program must be realistic and relevant to the objectives of the submitting institution's educational program development. Planning with the host country must be thorough and initiated far in advance of the time of the

project. Participants must understand fully the expectations held by the project director and stated in the grant proposal regarding their responsibilities before and during the seminar after it has ended.